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TRADITIONS AND METAMORPHOSES OF IRISH FOLKLORE IN JOSEPH SHERIDAN LE FANU'S GHOST STORIES

Anotacija

Viktorijas epochas rašytojas airis Džozefas Šeridan Le Faniū (1814–1873) visą savo gyvenimą buvo susijęs su airių folkloru ir liaudies tikėjimais, todėl šita tema jo pasakojimuose apie vaiduoklius buvo labai paplitusi. Straipsnyje tiriama, kaip autorius meistriškai modifikuoja airių folkloro motyvus ir sujungia juos su gotikos elementais. Pristatoma šitų autoriaus manipuliacijų, kuriomis sukuriama jo stilius gotikinėje literatūroje, lyginamoji literatūros mokslo analizė.

PAGRINDINIAI ŽODŽIAI: gotikinė literatūra, istorijos apie vaiduoklius, airių folkloras, tradicijos, metamorfozės, psichologinis siaubas.

Abstract

The Victorian Anglo-Irish writer, Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, had Irish folklore and folk beliefs around him all his life, and they are presented in many of his ghost stories. The present research investigates how the writer inventively modifies Irish folklore motives and joins them with traditional Gothic elements. As a result, the article presents a comparative literary study of such author's manipulations which lead to the creation of Le Fanu's own kind of spectacular Gothic.

KEY WORDS: Gothic literature, ghost story, Irish folklore, metamorphoses, psychological terror.

When exploring the Gothic it is difficult to isolate psychological factors from social issues. As a rule, people become greatly interested in something infernal and mystical in the very crucial moments of the development of any society. This interest is considered to be a human's reaction on the dull and oppressive atmosphere which surrounds him. As well as producing the effects of fear in their readers, Gothic novels and their Victorian transformations might be said to be the forms which are produced by fears and anxieties shared by late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century writers and their readers: political, social and religious problems of their time. Traditionally, the nineteenth century in Britain is known as the Victorian period, named after the reigning Queen Victoria. Victorian England in the middle of the 19th century was the country of rapid material and scientific progress. Industrial revolution of the 18–19th centuries had led to the foundation of bourgeois society, which changed and sometimes ruined the usual way of human's life. At the same time, the rapid development of science started to exclude religion from people's minds, as well as the fast growth of periodicals and literary magazines caused the splash of interest in the Anglo-Irish society to rational and irrational terrifying phenomena. This led to an increased interest in antiquarian studies and old forms, such as folktales, ballads and songs as their forms were considered to be examples of genuine and unspoiled emotion and expression being untainted by artificiality and preconceptions.

It was in that atmosphere that the interest to the genre of ghost storytelling emerged. As Nalecz-Wojtczak notes, there are many features common to be a ghost story: "a phenomenon of the supernatural, shortness, a moment of novelty, and a common atmosphere of tension" (Nalecz-Wojtczak 1987). One of its great practitioners was the Anglo-Irish writer Sheridan Le Fanu (1814–1873). Considered "the father of the English ghost story" (Purchase 2006), Le Fanu is recognized for combining Gothic literary conventions with realistic techniques and Irish folklore motives to create stories of psychological insight and supernatural terror. As the author was a great revisionist, no idea, character or theme avoided constant changes in his works. That is why, Le Fanu's ghost stories are of particular interest to see their development and refashion.

As it is suggested by its title, the aim of the present research is to investigate the Irish folklore motives and its various forms in Sheridan Le

Fanu's ghost stories; the aim is defined in a more precise way in the following tasks: to analyze the ways how the author inventively modifies folklore elements, transferring them into reality and joining with traditional Gothic motives.

Within the defined framework of the research, a synthesis of several literary research methods has been utilized: cultural-historical, literary-historical, bibliographical, as well as the comparative and hermeneutical principles of text interpretation.

As Hogle writes, "Le Fanu at different times was a writer of ballads voicing the aspirations and romance of Irish national life; a journalist expressing High Tory views; a historical romance writer; a writer of squibs and satires; a fine poet; and a supreme author of ghost stories" (Hogle 2006). Le Fanu wrote stories about ghosts, vampires, demonic monkeys, ruined castles and houses, people with dark secrets, people losing their minds, and villages whose tranquility is disturbed by mysterious visitors. Notwithstanding the fact that he was one of the most popular writers of the Victorian era, his name and most of his works are not as well-known to a common reader of the English literature as, for example, Charles Dickens, George Eliot, Elizabeth Gaskell and many others who created stories about ghosts and mysteries in respectable English families with their "own skeletons in the closets". During his lifetime, Le Fanu's works were moderately successful, although they received scant critical attention. Following Le Fanu's death, his reputation suffered a gradual decline as readers and critics lost interest in his realistic and psychological mode of Gothic narrative. In the 1920s, however, the prominent ghost-story writer M. R. James drew attention to Le Fanu by writing introductions reissued volumes of his out-of-print works. V. S. Pritchett and Elizabeth Bowen later wrote essays championing Le Fanu as one of Gothic literature's foremost figures. In 1978, Jack Sullivan summarized the opinion of modern critics in his assessment of Le Fanu's influence on horror literature: "Beginning with Le Fanu, one of the distinctive features of modern ghostly fiction is <...> the synthesis of psychology and supernaturalism" (Jack Sullivan 1978). Many modern critics (Jerrold Hogle, Jolanta Nalecz-Wojtczak, Willkie McCormack, Glynn Custred, Markman Ellis, Nina Auerbach) consider him an innovative and masterful writer of psychological terror fiction combined with local folklore. In the connection to the above mentioned the topical-

ity and novelty of the present research are obvious: on the one hand – the growing interest to the literary heritage left by Sheridan Le Fanu; on the other – the necessity to analyze his ghost stories, taking into account that they were influenced not only by Gothic literature, but also by Irish folklore and local traditions. Such manipulations lead to the creation of Le Fanu's own kind of spectacular Gothic.

On this basis it seems relevant to include into the present research a brief review of his biography, highlighting the major conditions which determined the work and stylistic peculiarities of the author as a representative of the Gothic fiction combined with the elements of Irish folklore.

Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu was born on the 28th of August, 1814, in a distinguished middle class Protestant family of Huguenot with a long history in Ireland, the country with rich folklore traditions. "Like William Carleton, William Sharp, and Charles Dickens, folklore was part of Le Fanu's childhood upbringing: he spent part of his boyhood at Abington in County Limerick <...> where he was exposed to the richness of Irish oral legends, especially the tales of a gifted local story-teller, Miss Anne Baily of Logue Guir" (Jason Marc Harris 1998). This fact influenced Le Fanu to turn to the local folklore, legends and ghost stories of Ireland for inspiration. According to his younger brother's memoirs, Le Fanu evidently shared this interest with his father who had an intensive library collection on these subjects. Moreover, Le Fanu's mother was interested in Irish history.

It should be emphasized that Ireland saw powerful changes during the author's lifetime. When the Le Fanu family lived in Limerick, unrest among the local catholic population broke out. Violent clashes between the Catholics and government representatives led to severe attacks. As the rights of Catholics suffered under legal restrictions in the form of the Penal laws, the question of Ireland's special status in the Anglo-Irish Union with the equal rights for its population arose.

During his life Le Fanu felt the pressures of his own family history: his father's position as an Anglican clergyman, his mother's sympathy with Irish rebels, and the political violence he witnessed during his childhood. Thus, in his works Le Fanu was pulled in two directions: one by his ancestral Protestant history and one by his national, Irish history. Similarly, Jean Lozes sees psychological unease in Le Fanu because of his life-long

divided political support for the two countries. On the one hand, he had a business sense of loyalty to England, and on the other, he had a literary sense of loyalty to Ireland, which, as a Le Fanu's admirer Jean Lozes notes in "Prince of the Invisible", "suggests a troubled, complicated case of divided loyalties, and the possibility of guilt, for it was impossible for Le Fanu to be true to all his sympathies at once" (Jean Lozes 2004).

Le Fanu studied law at Trinity college in Dublin and passed the bar, but never practiced. He gave up the law for journalism. His supernatural stories usually appeared in various periodicals – sometimes in his own "Dublin University Magazine", sometimes in Dickens's "All the Year Round", sometimes in Mrs. Braddon's "Belgravia". Le Fanu was a successful and prolific writer, with fourteen novels and about thirty ghost stories. Le Fanu died on the 7th of February 1873.

For many commentators supernatural in fiction are forms of the personal or political unconscious; for the Anglo-Irish, however, crisis became a way of life. Various forms of the Gothic fiction, as a literary scholar Terry Eagleton puts them, "might be dubbed the political unconscious of Anglo-Irish society, the place where its fears and fantasies most definitively emerge" (Terry Eagleton 1995). In Le Fanu's case, his political and religious fears and anxieties were strengthened by his wife's death, after which the writer lived in ever-increasing seclusion. He withdrew from society becoming known as the "Invisible Prince" for his shyness and nocturnal lifestyle.

In Le Fanu's opinion, Irish folklore and native customs give a wide possibility for such categories as "scenic" and "mysterious". He was sure, "Ireland with its wildish and sublime landscape, its ancient legends and traditions, loyalty and deep sorrow" (Sheridan Le Fanu 1964) could always find the words to express the feelings of national and cultural identity.

The collection "Best Ghost Stories of J. S. Le Fanu" contains stories from two collections: "Madam Crowl's Ghosts and Other Tales of Mystery" and "In a Glass Darkly", ranging from 1837 to 1871, two years before Le Fanu's death. As it would be expected from such a long life-span, they vary in style, as the author's techniques and purposes changed with the years. The ghost stories which are analyzed in the given article involve a heavy and various use of local folklore; they are the following: "The Ghost and the Bone-setter" (1838), "The White Cat of Drumgunniol" (1870),

"The Child That Went with the Fairies" (1870), and "Carmilla" (1872). As a literary scholar Custred writes, "like other Anglo-Irish writers, Le Fanu wove Irish characters and settings into his fiction, although he used far fewer folk themes in his stories than did others of that tradition" (Custred 2009). In this case, contrary to Le Fanu's other ghost stories, the above-mentioned stories obviously demonstrate the author's artistic manipulations with the Irish folklore, from its traditional to the newly invented forms.

The narration in the earliest ghost story "The Ghost and the Bone-setter" begins with a piece of Irish folklore: "It is perhaps necessary to add that the superstition illustrated by the following story, namely, that the corpse last buried is obliged, during his juniority of interment, to supply his brother tenants of the churchyard in which he lies, with fresh water to allay the burning thirst of purgatory, is prevalent throughout the south of Ireland" (Le Fanu 1964, 5).

In the story, Terry Neil, a bone-setter, agrees to keep watch over a big house which is rumored to be haunted by Old Squire. Being in "high spirits" the bone-setter sees Old Squire who emerges from his portrait. Terrified Neil has to reset Old Squire's leg which has been troubling the ghost in the afterlife. The howling wind and live portrait, which are traditional Gothic elements, should increase the feeling of terror and trouble. Instead of the terrible mayhem, the humorous version arises. The squire accidentally sips some holy water, mistaking it for whiskey, and is promptly blasted back into hell. The bone-setter does not die in the end of the story; therefore, the ghost is not a traditional death omen, in this case. McCormack asserts that the story is an example of how Le Fanu's early use of folklore was simplistic. The use of Irish folklore in the story diffuses the terror as "his elements of folklore intruded only to provide a comic or pseudo-Gothic effect; fears of Purgatory and graveside battles were transformed into cozy humor of "The Ghost and the Bone-setter". But in the later stories, "The White Cat of Drumgonniol", <...> "The Child That Went to the Fairies", <...> legend now becomes the material of conscious fiction, at once relaxed in style and intense with implication" (Wilkie J. McCormack 1997).

Throughout the evolution of Le Fanu's manipulation of Irish folklore, the idea of the main protagonist's relation to the harbinger of death con-

tinues to change, once again in relation of the emphasis of the Irish setting. The story "The White Cat from Drumgunniol" is again "narration within narration"; the first person retells the story told to him by Mr. Donovan, who is a teacher of the Irish language and is traveling from Limerick to Dublin.

Here we should mention that Irish folklore is filled with a vast range of mystical beings and ancient warriors. Tales of banshees, leprechauns and fairies are a mainstay of Irish myths and legends. There are two leanings of old Irish folklore in "The White Cat of Drumgunniol": the tale of the transformation of a princess into a white cat, and the image of a banshee. To clear up, the banshee is a feminine spirit in Irish mythology, usually seen as an omen of death and a messenger from the Otherworld. This mystical being is a fairy woman who begins to wail if someone is about to die. So the appearance of the banshee could foretell death. As Katherine Briggs defines, "the banshee can appear in a variety of guises; most often she appears as an ugly, frightening hag, but she can also appear as a stunningly beautiful woman of any age that suits her" (Katherine Briggs 1967). There is also a Victorian legend that a beautiful princess, a king's daughter, having gone down to bathe one day, was there enchanted by her wicked stepmother who hated her, and by the spell of the enchantment she was doomed to be one year a cat, another a swan, and another an otter; but with the privilege of assuming her natural shape one day in each year, under certain conditions.

In his story, Le Fanu opposes the cat-beast to the enchanted princess: "There is a famous story of a white cat, with which we all become acquainted in the nursery. I am going to tell a story of a white cat very different from the amiable and enchanted princess who took that disguise for a reason. The white cat of which I speak was a more sinister animal" (Le Fanu 1964, 408). Here, Le Fanu is cluing the reader into the fact that he is going to take a spin with past fantasy and make something horrific. The fierce white cat contains the vengeful spirit of a woman seduced and abandoned by Farmer Donovan. The moral dilemma is clear: a dead woman returns to revenge her enemy in the image of a white cat. The author compares it to the banshee who "seems to be animated with an affectionate sympathy with the bereaved family to whom it is hereditarily attached" (Le Fanu 1964, 409), and emphasizes the evil spirit with the words that

“it’s taking the shape of a cat – the coldest, and they say, the most vindictive of brutes – is vindictive of the spirit of its visit” (Le Fanu 1964, 417).

The ghost’s behavior is very aggressive, but the terror is breached with humorous description of Irish superstitions: when the peasants enter the room in search of the white cat, they arrive, “praying, crossing themselves, and not forgetting a sprinkling of holy water, they peeped, and finally searched, poking spades, “wattles”, pitchforks and such implements under the bed” (Le Fanu 1964, 416). This story like several other Le Fanu’s stories, belongs to the category of narratives concerning guilt and retribution, in which, as it would be suggested, the presence of the otherworld visitants is in some way justified. The above-mentioned scholar J. M. Harris in his tremendous work “Folklore and the Fantastic in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction” writes: “In the folk imagination, supernatural manifestations are reactions to human actions; folk beliefs concerning spirits represent a continuum from the visible world of natural interactions into the invisible world of moral impressions. Human actions that violate social norms – such as murder – cause a moral disturbance that extends into the supernatural world” (J. M. Harris 1998, 128). Thus, traditionally for the plot of ghost stories, Le Fanu presents here “a landscape of sin”, the dynamic incursion of the past into the present, but illustrates it with a special image from Irish folklore: a banshee as an omen of death.

One of the classic conventions of folktales is that of the tempter or temptress – a character that Le Fanu frequently works out. It is the story of typically a youth or a maiden who falls under the spell of a supernatural or unnatural being, a fairy. Fairies, as well as banshees, are a native element of Irish folklore. The Irish fairies are not, however, to be confused with the Victorian idea of small, gracious winged creatures upon which modern perceptions are based. Irish fairies may assume any form they desire; forms that may be beautiful or wretched. They live in a separate world of their own; the bridge between the faerie and human worlds is found on natural borders such as streams, fences or woodland edges. The human beings which are lured into the world of the faeries entirely forget their human life, past and common sense. In the ghost story “The Child That Went with the Fairies” the narrative adopts “the stolen child” motif from the folk legends – fairies steal human children. The Irish folklorist Sean O’Sullivan testifies the prevalence of this legend in “Folktales of Ireland”:

"It was a common belief in Irish oral tradition that the fairies were continually trying to abduct newborn children (usually males) to replenish their own fairy population, and that they also took young mothers into fairyland to suckle such abducted children. The Irish Folklore Commission has thousands of tales illustrating this belief" (Sean O'Sullivan 1966).

In "The Child That Went with the Fairies" the setting is once again clearly Ireland, with concrete landmarks being stated. Having violated the taboo of being outdoors at twilight, the children of the "widow named Mary Ryan" are vulnerable. The eldest daughter Nell is "infected" by the "terrors" of her mother, "many stories had she listened to by the winter hearth, of children stolen by the fairies, at nightfall" (Le Fanu 1964, 138). Nell goes out to look for the children and discovers only two of them; the youngest brother, Bill, has gone with "the grand ladies".

The faerie lady is identified as a temptress as she uses apples and glamour to distract the children and captures the boy's attention with creature comforts: "The children were so frighten <...>. But a very sweet voice from the open window of the carriage reassured them. A beautiful and very good-looking lady was smiling from it on them. The upper sides of the carriage were chiefly of glass, so that the children could see another woman inside, whom they did not like so well. This was a black woman, with a wonderfully long neck, hung round with many strings of large variously-colored beads, and on her head was a sort of turban of silk striped with all the colors of the rainbow, and fixed in it was a golden star. This black woman had a face as thin almost as a death's head, with high cheekbones, and great goggle eyes, the whites of which, as well her wide range of teeth, showed in brilliant contrast with her skin" (Le Fanu 1964, 140).

The end of the story "The Child That Went with the Fairies" is tragic: the boy who has gone with faeries and who has been given up by his family, returns sporadically home. His youngest siblings alone see him on his visits because they too have brushed with the faerie realm. The mother and the eldest sister do not see him because they have not had contact with the faeries. The stolen child has been stuck between life and death, form and spirit and his displacement should be very disrupting in both the worlds of folklore and the Gothic.

Key to Le Fanu's style in the latest ghost stories ("Carmilla" among them) is the avoidance of overt supernatural effects: in most of them the

supernatural is strongly implied but a possible natural explanation is left open. "Carmilla", the story from Le Fanu's latest collection "In a Glass Darkly" (1872), is important from a literary standpoint as it introduces the vampire legend in English literature. As Nina Auerbach notes in "Our Vampires, Ourselves", vampires are "an integral part of every generation's search for identity" (Auerbach 1995). In other words, the vampire is for every society a reflection and an expression of contemporary crisis. The vampire is, thus, the perfect figure for the Anglo-Irish Gothic: the idea of one human-like figure consuming another is allegorically ideal to represent British consumption of the Irish, the idea which was extremely significant for Le Fanu.

It should be mentioned that, desperate for money, Le Fanu spent the last ten years of his life rewriting his earlier stories and presenting them for a predominantly English audience. In 1863 he sent a contract with the English publisher Richard Bentley, which prohibited Irish settings. Thus, the story is set up in Stiria, near Austria (Central Europe being the natural habitat of the vampire) in a lonely but attractive castle which is occupied by a young girl Laura, her father, and two governesses. Their domestic peace is shattered by the accidental arrival of a beautiful but enigmatic young girl, Carmilla, who is brought into a castle to recuperate after a carriage accident. In the carriage, like in the story "The Child That Went with the Fairies" there is someone described as "a hideous black woman, with a sort of a colored turban on her head, <...> with gleaming eyes and large white eye-balls, and her teeth set as if in fury" (Le Fanu 1964, 286). Furthermore, Carmilla herself is described as being "absolutely beautiful" and having "such a sweet voice". Here, it would appear that Le Fanu is taking the same idea in a different direction. "Whereas "The Child That Went with the Fairies" rolls along in a painfully calm manner, the classic Irish folklore traditions in "Carmilla" "have been twisted to be far more Gothic" (Carmen Medici 2009). A mysterious stranger, Carmilla, gives no information about her past, but resembles a woman whose portrait (following Gothic tradition) hangs in the castle. The atmosphere of terror has become more and more thickening: some young maidens from the neighboring village are found dead, the symptoms of their death are quite strange: somebody has drunk their blood. Finally, Laura feels weak and languid, and her anxious father invites a half-mad vampirologist to

catch the vampire. As a result, it is Carmilla who turns to be a vampire; her real name is Countess Mircalla Karnstein, who has lived for more than a hundred of years. Differently from "The White Cat from Drumgonniol" and "The Child That Went with Fairies", infernal forces occupy not only the human's everyday life, but the victim's unconsciousness by means of dreams, delirium, trance, and neurotic disease. Laura describes it in the following way: "I cannot call it a nightmare, for I was quite conscious of being asleep. But I was equally conscious of being in my room, and lying in bed, precisely as I actually was. I saw or fancied I saw, the room and its furniture just as I had seen it last, except it was very dark, and I saw something moving round the foot of the bed, which I first could not accurately distinguish. But I soon saw that it was a sooty-black animal that resembled a monstrous cat. <...> The two broad eyes approached my face, and suddenly I felt a stinging pain as if two large needles darted, an inch or two apart, deep into my breast. I woke up with a scream" (Le Fanu 1964, 304).

Glynn Custred names Le Fanu "an artist in the domestic insinuation of the supernatural" (Custred 2009). The writer artistically proves that it is much more terrifying when the supernatural firstly obtrudes into prosaic, everyday life, and then invades the victim's 'internal' space. As we can see from the story, the author does not attempt to give a clear explanation of the situation; on the contrary, he uses folklore customs and finds there various measures how to find a vampire. At the end of the story, the cat-vampire turns into a misshapen black mass; according to Le Fanu's view, it proclaims difficulties and doubts in defeating the evil. It should be mentioned, the story has been laid open to several critical interpretations: for some readers it is a tale of lesbianism, for others, Carmilla represents the subconscious projection of Laura's dead mother, who was related to the Karnsteins, for others it is simply a vampire story.

Moreover, the story "Carmilla" served as the basis for several films, including Hammer's "The Vampire Lovers" (1970), Roger Vadim's "Blood and Roses" (1960), Danish director Carl Theodor Dreyer's "Vampyr" (1932), and Herry Kummel's "Daughters of Darkness" (1971). These film adaptations of Le Fanu's story, each in its own way, artistically mix surrealistic images with themes of death and redemption and rework the ideas which go back to the origins of Gothic and folklore.

The above said leads to some conclusions. Firstly, regardless the fact that Le Fanu had remained a generally unknown and unrecognized literary figure by the end of the 20th century, nowadays he starts enjoying the popularity which he obviously deserves. Moreover, Le Fanu has been called “the inventor of the modern tale of the supernatural” (Custred 2009). Leaving aside question of the first, Le Fanu obviously introduced something new into the short story of supernatural: his accurate description of psychological details, especially the details of psychological abnormalities, as his own vision of the supernatural. Consequently, the artistic world of Le Fanu's ghost stories has a complex structure: on the one hand, the author artistically uses traditional Irish folklore-mythological motives in order to reach a humorous effect; on the other hand, he joins them with traditional Gothic motives and transfers them not only into reality, but into the character's sub-consciousness. Such author's manipulations lead to the metamorphoses of Irish folklore and make his stories more realistic and psychological; the given fact allows to consider Sheridan Le Fanu the master of his own kind of spectacular Gothic.

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TRADICIJOS IR AIRIŲ FOLKLORO METAMORFOZĖS DŽOZEFO ŠERIDANO LE FANIU PASAKOJIMUOSE APIE VAIDUOKLIUS

Santrauka

Pasakojimai apie vaiduoklius Viktorijos epochos Anglijoje buvo labai populiarūs. Jie atsirado dėl įvairių gotikinės literatūros požanrių ir padaviimų. Džozefas Šeridas Le Faniu (1814–1873) – vienas iš populiariausių to meto, bet vėliau užmirštų XIX a. antrosios pusės vardų literatūroje.

Straipsnyje minimas pasakojimų rinkinys sudarytas iš pasakojimų – „Geriausieji pasakojimai apie vaiduoklius, parašyti Džozefo Šeridano Le Faniu“, kurie pirmiausia buvo skelbti ankstesniuose autoriaus rinkiniuose, būtent: „Madam Krauli dvasia ir kitos paslaptingos istorijos“ ir „Aptemdytame veidrodyje“. Šiame straipsnyje analizuojami rinkinio pasakojimai: „Šmėkla ir kaulų įnarintojas“ (1838), „Balta katė iš Drumgoniolo“ (1868), „Vaikas, kurį išsivedė fėjos“ (1870) ir „Karmila“ (1872). Autorius pasakojimų rašymo techniką ir tikslus keitė gana ilgą laiką, todėl jų stiliai skiriasi. Tačiau visos šitos istorijos vyksta Airijoje ir jų pagrindas – tai turtingo airių folkloro elementai.

Kritikų nuomone, ankstyvieji Le Faniu pasakojimai (pvz., „Šmėkla ir kaulų įnarintojas“) patvirtina nuomonę, kad savo literatūrinės veiklos pradžioje autorius naudojosi jam taip artimais folkloro motyvais tik tam, kad turiniui suteiktų komišką atspalvį, o tai sukūrė pseudogotikinį efektą. Laikui bėgant Le Faniu atitolsta nuo komiškų efektų ir pasakoja apie tokias kategorijas, kaip kaltė ir atpildas, praeitis ir ateitis, praeities įtaka ir ateities gyvenimas. Tradiciniais vaizdais, pasiskolintais iš airių folkloro ir dramatiškos airių istorijos, Le Faniu piešia paslaptingo įvykio paveikslą,

kuris, viena vertus, gali būti racionališkai paaiškintas, kita vertus, negauna jokio paaiškinimo ir todėl išsaugo savo paslaptingumą. Taip airių banša, pasirodanti katės pavidalu, yra mirties pranašė ir keršija savo skriaudėjams (pasakojimas „Balta katė iš Drumgoniolo“), fėjos apžavi savo balsu ir vagia vaikus siekdamos pratęsti savo padermę, o paskui paverčia juos vaiduokliais („Vaikas, kurį išsivedė fėja“), vampyrai pasirodo ne tik realiame personažų gyvenime, bet ir jų sąmonės pakraštyje: sapnuose, esant nervinei įtampai, nervų sutrikimo atvejais (pasakojimas „Kamila“). Visiems Le Faniu pasakojimams, kurie remiasi airių folkloro siužetais, būdingas ryškus moralizavimas: nusikalstama praeitis visada kelia grėsmę dabarčiai. Iš daugybės konkrečių folkloro detalių rašytojas sugebėjo sukurti dramatišką airių gyvenimo atmosferą praeitame šimtmetyje, sukurti tipažus, parodančius jos pagrindinius socialinius sluoksnius, taip pat išreikšti savo meilę gimtinei.

Šitaip, pradėdamas nuo paprasto folkloro panaudojimo komiško tikslams ir suteikdamas spalvingumo personažams, Le Faniu tampa psichologinio pasakojimo meistras vėlesniuose pasakojimuose, kuriuose folkloro personažai vaidina atpildo ir mirties pranašų vaidmenį. Tokiu atveju pasakojimuose vyrauja nebaigto sakinio efektas, bet skaitytojo nepalieka paslapties jausmas. Šitos autoriaus manipuliacijos padėjo Le Faniu sukurti savo stilių gotikinėje literatūroje.